

complete freedom from worldly attachment. A St. Vincent de Paul could devote his life to the destitute and the oppressed. A St. Camillus could wash the sores of the abandoned sick. All these have been honored because their love of God led them to cast their lot with the least of Christ's brethren.

The church has endorsed poverty by demanding it from those who have entered the solemn religious life. These give up the right to use and dispose of worldly goods. They do this, not because the world that God made is evil, but in order to cut their ties to all that might turn their gaze from God and lead them to concentrate on the passing and corruptible.

Yet, and herein lies the paradox of the Christian teaching on poverty, the church also speaks of a form of poverty that hurts the soul, something totally different from religious detachment from worldly goods. There is a destitution that binds men to this earth, since it forces them to use every waking moment to keep body and soul together. There is want that breeds bitterness and resentment, even hatred.

Pope Pius XII, in his Christmas message of 1952, talked "of the consequences of poverty, still more of the consequences of utter destitution. For some families there is a dying daily, a dying hourly; a dying multiplied, especially for parents, by the number of dear ones they behold suffering and wasting away * * * sickness becomes more serious, because it is not properly treated; it strikes little ones in particular, because preventive measures are lacking."

"Then there is the weakening and consequent physical deterioration of whole generations. Whole masses of the population are brought up as enemies of law and order, so many poor girls gone astray, pushed down into the bottom of the abyss, because they believed that that was the only way out of their shameful poverty. Moreover, not rare is the case where it is wretched misery that leads to crime. Those who in their works of charity visit our prisons affirm constantly that not a few men, fundamentally decent, have gone to prison because extreme poverty has led them to commit some unpremeditated act."

Pope Pius XII is but one of the great modern Popes who, particularly in the last 70 years, have shown deep concern for poverty in our industrial society. There is an essential difference between the austerity of the Trappist monk who cultivates the fields and prays to God in his simple cell and the wretchedness of those who live in the slums of our large cities. The monk is poor, but he has sufficient to eat; he has adequate clothing and needed medical care. He is a respected member of society.

But there are those in our slums who do not have enough to eat. Their clothing is worn and threadbare. They are overcrowded in wretched housing. They have no privacy, not even the mercy of silence. And, the greatest hurt of all, they feel rejected and unwanted. They could die, and no one would shed a tear.

This poverty, in the words of Pope Pius XII, often leads to "social conditions which, whether one wills it or not, make difficult or practically impossible a Christian life" (Solennita, June 1, 1941). Again this same Pope states: "The Christian must be ever mindful that the establishment of God's kingdom in men's hearts and in social institutions often requires a minimum of human development. * * * For this reason, the Christian will always be ready to work for the relief of every material distress. * * * In a word, he will be diligent to achieve the betterment of the poor and the disinherited" (address, Apr. 25, 1957).

What precisely did the Pope have in mind when he spoke of degrading social conditions? Let us listen to his description of slum living: "Dilapidated, ramshackle houses without the most necessary hygienic installations sometimes yield a sizable income to their owners without costing them a penny. Inevitably, they neglect to make necessary repairs in them for years on end.

"Enough can never be said about the harm that these dwellings do to the families condemned to live in them. Deprived of air and light, living in filth and in unspeakable commingling, adults and, above all, children quickly become the prey of contagious diseases which find a favorable soil in their weakened bodies. But the moral injuries are still more serious: immorality, juvenile delinquency, the loss of taste for living and working, interior rebellion against a society that tolerates such abuses, ignores human beings, and allows them to stagnate in this way, transformed gradually into wrecks.

"Society itself must bear the consequences of this lack of foresight. Because it did not wish to prevent the evil and to provide a remedy in time, it will spend enormous sums to keep up an appearance of curbing delinquency and to pay expenses for prolonged confinement in sanatoriums and clinics. How many millions are authorized for the cure of evils that it would be easier and less expensive to prevent?" (address, May 3, 1957).